LAPORAN AKHIR
PENELITIAN SKEMA PENELITIAN TERAPAN

CANDIDACY CONTESTATION IN THE WORLD-LARGEST MUSLIM ORGANIZATION: LESSON LEARNED FROM POLITICAL CAMPAIGN DISCOURSES DURING MUKTAMAR NAHDLATUL ULAMA (NU) 2021

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Informasi Data Usulan Penelitian

1. IDENTITAS PENELITIAN

A. JUDUL PENELITIAN

Candidacy contestation in the world-largest Muslim organization: Lesson learned from political campaign discourses during Muktamar Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) 2021

B. SKEMA, BIDANG, TEMA, DAN TOPIK PENELITIAN

Skema Penelitian	Bidang Fokus Penelitian	Tema Penelitian	Topik Penelitian
Penelitian Terapan	Sosial Humaniora - Seni Budaya - Pendidikan	Pembangunan dan penguatan sosial budaya	Demokrasi, politik, dan pemilihan umum

C. KOLABORASI DAN RUMPUN ILMU PENELITIAN

Jenis Kolaborasi Penelitian	Rumpun Ilmu 1	Rumpun Ilmu 2	Rumpun Ilmu 3
Kolaboratif Luar Negri	ILMU SOSIAL HUMANIORA	ILMU POLITIK	Ilmu Pemerintahan

D. WAKTU PELAKSANAAN

Tahun Usulan	Tahun Pelaksanaan	Lama Penelitian
2022	2023	1

E. ANCOR RESEARCH

Anchor Research	Topik Anchor
Eko Priyo Purnomo, Prof., S.IP., M.Si.,M.Res., Ph.D.	ICT Governance interoperability, Development and Policy Sustainability

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3. MITRA KERJASAMA PENELITIAN (JIKA ADA)

Pelaksanaan penelitian dapat melibatkan mitra kerjasama, yaitu mitra kerjasama dalam melaksanakan penelitian, mitra sebagai calon pengguna hasil penelitian, atau mitra investor

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5. LUARAN DAN TARGET CAPAIAN

Luaran Wajib

Tahun	Jenis Luaran
1	Publikasi Jurnal Internasional terindeks SCOPUS,
1	Naskah Kebijakan

Luaran Tambahan

Tahun	Jenis Luaran

6. KLUSTER

Kluster	Sub Kluster	Group Riset	Mata kuliah
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7. ANGGARAN

Rencana anggaran biaya penelitian mengacu pada PMK yang berlaku dengan besaran minimum dan maksimum sebagaimana diatur pada buku Panduan Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat.

Total Keseluruhan RAB Rp. 27,000,000

Tahun 1 Total Rp. 27,000,000

Jenis Pembelanjaan	Komponen	Item	Satuan	Vol.	Harga Satuan	Total
BAHAN	Bahan (Habis Pakai)	NVivo 12 Plus licence (Asli)	Unit	1	Rp. 12,463,604	Rp. 12,463,604
PENGUMPULAN DATA	Biaya Konsumsi Harian	Konsumsi Harian Coding (3 Asisten Peneliti)	OH	120	Rp. 40,000	Rp. 4,800,000
ANALISIS DATA	Biaya Konsumsi Rapat	Rapat Prepencanaan Coding, Trial coding, Evaluasi Coding, dan Finalisisasi hasil coding	OH	3	Rp. 500,000	Rp. 1,500,000
PELAPORAN, LUARAN WAJIB, DAN LUARAN TAMBAHAN	Article Processing Charge (APC)	Native proofreading	Artikel	2	Rp. 3,000,000	Rp. 6,000,000

Jenis Pembelanjaan	Komponen	Item	Satuan	Vol.	Harga Satuan	Total
ANALISIS DATA	Biaya Konsumsi Rapat	Rapat perencanaan Proposal, Hasil Penelitian, Penulisan Artikel, dan Finalisasi Artikel	OH	2	Rp. 500,000	Rp. 1,000,000
PELAPORAN, LUARAN WAJIB, DAN LUARAN TAMBAHAN	Biaya Seminar Internasional	Sminar International Fee	Paket	1	Rp. 1,236,396	Rp. 1,236,396

8. LEMBAR PENGESAHAN

HALAMAN PENGESAHAN
LAPORAN AKHIR PENELITIAN SKEMA:

Judul : Candidacy contestation in the world-largest Muslim organization: Lesson learned from political campaign discourses during Muktamar Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) 2021

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Biaya : Rp. 27,000,000

Yogyakarta, 09 Agustus 2023
Mengetahui,
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9. RINGKASAN

Campaigns have a strategical position in political contestations such as the election of presidents and governors as well as the congress of political parties and social movement organisations. This study analyses what acclaim, attack, and defence messages were used by Said Aqil and Gus Yahya during the pre-*Muktamar* Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) 2021 and whether those messages influence the success of Gus Yahya, as the challenger, in taking over the NU leadership from the incumbent (Said Aqil). The study applied the discourse analysis method. We based our data on the statements of both candidates, including their campaign teams and supporters, appearing in the three largest online news media in Indonesia: tempo.co, detik.com, and kumparan.com. The research has shown that Said Aqil focused on highlighting his achievements in education and healthcare within the NU, while Gus Yahya emphasised the need for political repositioning and leadership regeneration. Both candidates addressed each other's weaknesses, with criticisms revolving around Gus Yahya's participation in the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and Said Aqil's incapable leadership and NU's relationship with political parties. We find that Gus Yahya emerged with more persuasive campaign messages. Gus Yahya's proposal to reposition the NU's political role garnered substantial support among NU followers.

10. KEYWORDS

Indonesia; political contestation; Muslim organisation; functional discourse analysis; Nahdlatul Ulama (NU); and local democracy

11. HASIL PELAKSANAAN PENELITIAN

Nahdlatul Ulama and the *Muktamar* in Context

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is well-known to be the Sunni orthodoxy Muslim organisation along with al-Azhar al-Sharif of Egypt and *al-Rabita al-Muhammadiya lil-'Ulama'* of Morocco (Pektas, 2021). NU was founded in 1921 by Hasyim As'ari, an Islamic cleric (*ulama*) and the head of an Islamic school (*pesantren*) in East Java, Indonesia (Barton, 2014; Saenong, 2021). Since the nineteenth century, the *pesantren* had emerged in Indonesia and it expanded of the early twentieth century (Barton, 2014). The *ulama* and its *pesantren* are the core personnels and institutions of NU with strong influences in the rural Muslim society (Fealy & Bush, 2014). *Ulama* is considered as the most reliable interpreters of the holy Koran and the Sunna (the records of Prophet Muhammad's deed and words) (Nakamura, 1981). Fealy & Bush (2014) figure out that the establishment of NU was a reaction of the traditional *ulama* rooted in the *pesantren* to the growing threat of Islamic modernism in teaching and education introduced by Middle Eastern scholars, such as Muhammad Abduh. Besides that, the establishment was connected to the *Wahhabi Salafis* movement in Mecca and Medina in the mid-1920s who had a fundamentalism doctrine to destroy the historical tombs and pilgrimage sites. NU was a committee formed among traditional *ulama* in Java who sent a delegation to the King Saud of Saudi Arabia in urging his power to save the historical sites in the two holy cities (Barton, 2014).

In the Indonesian context, NU is considered a civil Islam organisation who rejects the Islamic state's idea, yet they agree with the idea of Indonesia as a multi-cultural state granting the equal rights for all religious groups (Barton, 2014). Brown & Fauzia (2019) argue that NU and Muhammadiyah accept the idea of democracy and civil pluralism with the justification of Islamic scripture and philosophy. The civil Islam offers a middle path between Islamic liberalism and conservatism towards the relationship between religion and state through the spirit of public dialogue (Hefner, 2011). This role of the middle path is critical to maintain the Indonesia's democracy (Brown & Fauzia, 2019) in the situation where the Islamic radicalisation is on the rise (Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018). To forge a peaceful message of Islam within the world society, NU has also promoted the idea of "Islam Nusantara" or "locally developed Islam" (Schmidt, 2021). According to Pektas (2021), Pribadi (2022), and Schmidt (2021), the Islam Nusantara is an alternative form of global Islam, dominated by the middle east perspective, that offers social harmony of the moderate Islam against Islamic extremism and fundamentalism. The idea of Islam Nusantara proposes an appreciation of the linkage between Islam and the diversity of Indonesian local cultures (Saenong, 2021).

NU also works with social services such as education through the *pesantren*, health institutions, and disaster mitigation centres (Barton, 2014). There are about 23,000 *pesantren*, 71 colleges and universities, and 25 hospitals affiliated with the NU. *Pesantren* is Islamic boarding schools oriented towards the transmission of religious learning, but nowadays most of them adopt the parallel programmes with the modern curriculum for the teaching secular subjects (Barton, 2014). During the Covid-19 pandemic, NU takes an active role in treating the covid-19 positive people in its hospitals and supporting the vaccination programmes (Rachmawati et al., 2022). According to Barton (2014), these activities are best considered as Islamic social movement that are inspired by the Islamic traditions. NU is organisationally led by the central board in Jakarta extended to the smallest local boards throughout Indonesia such regional board (PWNU, for the provincial level), the district board (PCNU, for the district level), and the sub-district board (MWC NU, for the sub-district level) (Saenong, 2021). Since 2000s, NU also has developed special branches (PCI-NU) in 31 countries throughout the globe. For example, the PCI-NU of the United Kingdom was established in early 2000s while the PCI-NU of Germany was founded in 2011 by NU's young intellectuals (Pribadi, 2022).

Every five years, the organisation conducts the national congress called "*Muktamar*" attended by delegates from the regional boards to the lowest level of the boards and the special branches. The *Muktamar* is the highest level of conference in the organisation that aims to evaluate the efforts of the central executive board, develop strategical programmes, renew the constitution (if needed), and discuss contemporary issues related to Islamic practices. However, the most critical agenda of the *Muktamar* is to elect new central board leaderships of *Tanfidziyah* (executive council) and *Syuriah* (the religious council) (Nakamura, 1981). The Syuriah is organisationally considered as a superior over Tanfidziyah since the council is exclusively led and consisted of the ulama. However, Tanfidziyah has a strategical position since the executive leader has an authority to deal with the daily activities of organisation and respond to the contemporary issues in the society. Hasyim & Yew-Foong (2022) claim whoever was elected to be the leader of the NU executive council means to lead the largest Islamic organisation in the world.

Findings

We found that both the incumbent and challenger discussed more on policies in all functions of the discourse: acclaims, attacks, and defences while their campaign teams and supporters discussed more on characters (Appendix 1). The crosstab analysis also showed that the incumbent acclaimed more than the challenger. However, the challenger and its campaign teams attacked more frequently against the incumbent. The challenger also defended more than the incumbent, yet the campaign teams and supporters of the incumbent defended more than the challenger (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The percentage of acclaim, attack, and defence messages addressed by the incumbent and challenger as well as their campaign teams and supporters.

Figure 2. Word frequency in the discourse of policies and characters in acclaims
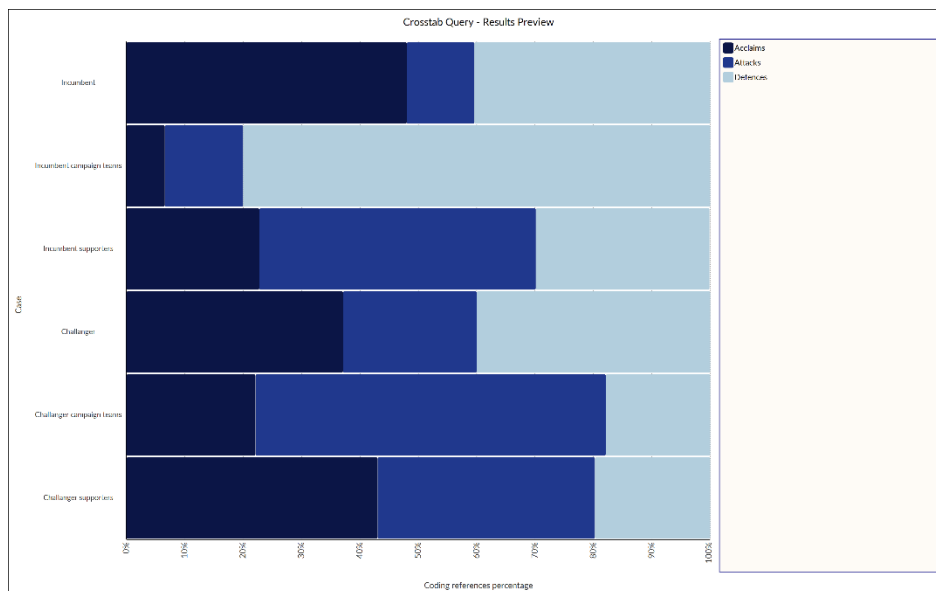
Acclaims of the incumbent and challenger in policy and character

The incumbent acclaimed more over past deeds in policies, particularly on the issue of education, economics, and political affairs. Meanwhile, the challenger acclaimed more over future plans on the issue of politics and organisational affairs (Appendix 1).

The incumbent acclaimed that during his ten years of leadership, PBNU established 34 new universities and seven hospitals and granted annual scholarship awards to about 100 NU activists to continue their studies abroad. He was able to develop *pesantren An-Nahdliyah* under the legal entity of PBNU. Although NU was well known as a network of *ulama* and its *pesantren*, Said Aqil claimed the legal entity of *pesantren* was mainly under the *ulama's* ownership. The incumbent also claimed he had reformed the organisation. The savings budget of the organisation increased from 500 million IDR to 1.8 trillion IDR. In terms of politics, Said Aqil claimed he would keep the closed relationship between NU and the Joko Widodo regime and continue supporting the government programmes, particularly in encountering Islamic fundamentalism. Moreover, Said Aqil said that NU would be proactively engaged in politics in which the NU activists should lead the strategical positions within the government institutions (Detik.com, 8.12).

In contrast, the challenger promised political repositioning of NU. He emphasised that there would not be a vice presidential candidate from NU in the next-2024 presidential election as in 2019 (Tempo.co, 12.10). NU would also have an equal relationship with all political parties, including the National Awakening Party (PKB). Although PKB was established by NU's leaders in 1998, not all NU followers were affiliated with the PKB (Kumparan.com, 14.12). The vision of the incumbent was to revive the idea of Gus Dur. According to Gus Yahya, to revive Gus Dur referred to two agendas: 1) to strengthen the NU's role in the global arena for a better human civilisation; and 2) to consolidate the independence of NU as a social movement organisation in Indonesia (Kumparan, 24.12). Gus Yahya argued that NU has an essential position to participate in global conflict mediation and to promote democracy in Muslim-majority countries (Kumparan, 21.12). Under his leadership, NU would have national strategical programmes such as in economics introduced by the central board (PBNU) and implemented by the regional (PWNU) and district levels (PCNU) (Tempo.co, 20.12).

Regarding characters, all candidates acclaimed more on leadership, followed by ideals and personal qualities (Appendix 1). In leadership, the incumbent and its supporters acclaimed more on experiences while the challenger's praised more on the need for regeneration (Appendix 1).

The supporters of the incumbent argued that Said Aqil deserved to lead the NU for the third round because he was an experienced leader. The NU's regional board of DKI Jakarta and West Sumatra declared to support Said Aqil with an argument that Said Aqil could position NU in a difficult situation during the 2019 presidential election and modernise the management of the organisation (Detik.com, 3.11). The campaign teams and supporters of the challenger, by contrast, argued that there was a critical need for the regeneration of NU leadership. For example, Nusron Wahid said that NU should be led by a new and young generation such as Gus Yahya in its early second-year century. The regional boards of Central Java and East Java, two provinces with the NU majority followers in Indonesia, declared to support the challenger due to the need for regeneration (Tempo.co, 9.12).

Looking at ideals, the incumbent acclaimed to have great support from charismatic *ulama*. Said Aqil claimed that *kyai* Anwar (from Kediri), *kyai* Turmudzi (from Lombok), *kyai* Muhtadi (from Banten), and Habib Lutfi (from Pekalongan) supported him (Kumparan.com, 7.10). Similarly, the challenger campaign teams acclaimed that the charismatic *ulama* from Lirboyo, Sidogiri, Ploso, and Madura agreed to support Gus Yahya (Tempo.co, 21.12). The challenger also emphasised his claims on the Gus Dur legitimation on his character. Gus Yahya said that Gus Dur was the main inspiration and he was grateful to become the spokesperson of Gus Dur (from 1999 – 2001) when he had a personal relationship to learn about Islam and politics (NU online, 18.12). His supporters claimed that Gus Yahya represented the unique character of Gus Dur (Detik.com, 9.10).

Regarding personal qualities, Said Aqil came from a *pesantren* family in Cirebon, West Java, where his father was the founder and leader of the *pesantren*. He learned the Islamic scriptures from his father at an early age and continued his study at Lirboyo in East Java. He pursued a bachelor's degree in Islamic theology (in 1982) from King Abdul Aziz University and his master's and PhD in Islamic theology and philosophy (in 1987 and 1994) from the University of Ummul Quro, all in Saudi Arabia (NU online, 18.12). His supporters claimed that with such Islamic education background, Said Aqil was better suited to lead NU than Gus Yahya (Padasuka TV, 23.12). Gus Yahya also came from a *pesantren* family where his father was the leader of *pesantren* Raudlatul Thalibin in Rembang, Central Java. He was the nephew of a charismatic *ulama*, Mustafa Bisri and the grandson of Bisri Mustofa, one of the outstanding NU leaders (Mutaqin, 2022). Gus Yahya studied Islamic scriptures from *pesantren* Al-Munawir Krapyak in Yogyakarta while involved in public schools. He continued his education in sociology at Gadjah Mada University, but he decided to leave the college to study Islam in Saudi Arabia (NU online, 18.12).

The cloud analysis found that 1) the idea and legitimation of Gus Dur, 2) the role of NU in political affairs (*politik*), 3) the proposal of programmes, 4) the political support from PWNU and PCNU, and 5) the legitimation of *ulama* (*kyai)* were five dominant issues coming up in the discourse of acclaims (Figure 2).

Attacks against the incumbent and challenger in policy and character

We found that the incumbent attacked more on the issue of politics and religious affairs. Meanwhile, the challenger attacked more on the topic of politics and organisational affairs (Appendix 2).

The incumbent was critical of the challenger's decision to attend an international forum organised by the global American Jewish Committee (AJC) in Jerusalem in 2018. On his visit, Gus Yahya also met with the Prime Minister of Israel, Netanyahu, in Tel Aviv. Said Aqil said that NU should always stand with the Indonesian foreign policy for the independency of Palestine (Detik.com, 6.10). The supporters of the incumbent saw that that Gus Yahya's decision was controversial among the Indonesian Muslim society, who most of them supported the freedom of Palestine (Kumpraran.com, 21.12). Said Aqil also argued that the liberalism ideology of thought influenced such Gus Yahya's attitude (the visit to Israel). He worried about the rise of liberalism within the young generations of NU because it could lead the organisation to move away from its tradition (*ahli sunnah wal jamaah;* Sunni orthodoxy doctrine) (Kumparan.com, 14.12).

In contrast, the challenger was critical of the NU's active involvement in the presidential election during Said Aqil's leadership. According to Gus Yahya, the success of NU in supporting Ma'ruf Amin as the vice president of Joko Widodo came at the cost of conflicts between the supporters and oppositions of the president (Kumparan.com, 14.12). Gus Yahya argued that NU needed to maintain harmonies within society instead of taking part in the conflict and using political identity against the opposition (Detik.com, 18.10). For example, Gus Yahya deplored Said Aqil, who often used jokes of "crooked pants" and "black forehead" against the Salafi Muslim communities (NU Online, 18.12). Gus Yahya also criticised the incumbent statement that NU was entitled to lead all strategic positions within the government to represent the vision of a political party leader (Kumparan.com, 14.12). Gus Yahya was concerned with the centralisation approach of Said Aqil when the central boards of NU needed more awareness to share its programmes with the local boards (Detik.com, 11.12).

Figure 3. Word frequency in the discourse of policies and characters in acclaims

Looking at the characters, the supporters of the incumbent actively attacked the challenger, particularly on values, leadership experiences and education background in personal quality. In contrast, the campaign teams and supporters of the challenger were critical against the incumbent particularly on the principles in ideals and regeneration in leadership (Appendix 2).

The incumbent was concerned with the government intervention to support the challenger in the *Muktamar*. Said Aqil publicly asked Joko Widodo to be neutral and to let the congress delegates decide the executive leader of NU (Detik.com, 14.12). This statement came up since there was an indication of the hotel's sabotage around the venue of the *Muktamar* by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to mobilise NU local delegates in supporting the challenger (Detik.com, 14.12). The minister of Religious Affairs, himself, was the younger brother of the challenger. The supporters of Said Aqil told the media that the challenger's campaign teams facilitated free flight tickets for 469 NU local delegates (voters) to come to Lampung (Kumparan.com, 21.12). The supporters reminded all congress delegates that Gus Yahya needed more experience to lead NU (Kumparan.com, 23.12). They also degraded the educational background of Gus Yahya, who never completed his undergraduate from either Gadjah Mada University or any university in Saudi Arabia (Pada Suka TV, 23.12).

The campaign teams of the challenger, by contrast, argued that Said Aqil was too old (70 years old) to lead the NU (Kumparan.com, 10.9). The supporters of Gus Yahya argued that if Said Aqil led the organisation for the third time, it would obstruct the regeneration processes within the NU leadership (Tempo.co, 15.12). Moreover, Saifullah Yusuf was very critical of the fairness of *Muktamar*. He perceived that the decision of Said Aqil on 16th November to postpone the *Muktamar* (from 23rd to 24th of December 2021) for an undetermined time was an act that violated the NU constitution (Kumparan.com, 1.12). He said that Said Aqil, as the executive leader of NU, could not organise the *Muktamar* and the postponement of *Muktamar* would benefit Said Aqil in consolidating his supporters (Tempo co, 19.11).

We also found that there were five dominant issues discussed in the attacks namely 1) Israel, 2) politics (*politik*), 3) regenerations (*regenerasi*), 4) sabotage and hotels (*sabotase*), and 5) letters (*surat*) (Figure 3). The issue of Israel and politics represented the discourse on policies, while regenerations, sabotages, hotels, and letters reflected the dominant discourses in characters.

Defences of the incumbent and challenger in policy and character

In terms of policy, both the incumbent and challenger defended more on the future plan and the past deed (Appendix 2).

The incumbent defended his plan that the active involvement of NU in politics would be for the sake of organisation's development, not for his own ambition. He told the media that he had no ambition to become a president or a minister. He promised that NU would always be independent of any government intervention even the organisation took part in supporting the presidential candidacy in 2019 (Tempo.co, 21.12). Said Aqil answered against the critics of his top-down leadership that if the regional boards of NU were not satisfied with his programmes, they would not accept his accountability reports during the *Muktamar* (Kumparan.com, 23.12). He claimed that although there were not many transferred programmes from PBNU, NU's regional boards were very independent in creating their economic initiatives to empower rural Muslim communities in dealing with property (Kumparan.com, 23.12).

Gus Yahya was concerned about the criticisms against his visit to Israel in 2018. He argued that building a close relationship with Jews communities was critical if NU committed to participating in the peace negotiation of Palestine – Israel. He claimed that he continued Gus Dur's legacy, who visited Israel in 2002 to promote a harmonious relationship between Muslim and Jews communities (Detik.com, 6.10). Gus Yahya said that he always stood for Palestine, and his efforts were aimed at the freedom of Palestine (Kumparan.com, 14.12). He claimed that during the visit, he asked the Jews communities to change their attitudes and mindset about Palestine and Islam (Detik.com, 28.9). He believed that there were shared values and interests between Muslim and Jews communities. Gus Yahya argued that NU had a responsibility to take the lead in the Palestine-Israel conflict resolution processes as Gus Dur previously pioneered that effort (Kumparan.com, 14.12).

Figure 4. Word frequency in the discourse of policies and characters in acclaims

Looking at the characters, the incumbent and his campaign teams and supporters defended more the fairness of *Muktamar* and regeneration. Meanwhile, the challenger and his campaign teams and supporters defended more on the government intervention towards the *Muktamar* and the educational background of Gus Yahya (Appendix 2).

Said Aqil clarified that he postponed the *Muktamar* for an undetermined time because he followed the social mobility restriction of the covid-19 introduced by the central government (Tempo.co, 18.11). The *Muktamar* could also finally held from 22nd – 24th of December 2021 since the government withdrew the restriction (Detik.com, 7.12). Said Aqil also argued that the constitution of NU allowed him to lead the NU for the third round period and NU followers should not worry about his age because he would involve many young generations in the next NU central boards (Detik.com, 8.12). Gus Yahya also defended himself by saying there was no government intervention to support him in the *Muktamar*. He granted that President Joko Widodo had no political interest in intervening to the result of *Muktamar* (Kumparan.com, 22.12). The supporters answered about Gus Yahya's educational background. They said even though Gus Yahya did not hold any college degree, they believe that the challenger had the intellectual capacity to lead the NU, as Gus Dur, who did not finish his study at the university (Tempo.co, 22.12).

The cloud analysis also showed that the issues of 1) Palestine, 2) free from government intervention (*pemerintah; dukungan*), 3) constitution of the organisation (*konsitusi*), 4) politics (*politik*), and 5) property (*kemiskinan*) were five dominant issues coming up in the discourse of defences (Figure 4).

Discussions

As Benoit (2019) figures out that persuasive campaign messages addressed by the candidates can influence the voter's preferability, we also found the similar situation in the *Muktamar* NU 2021. The incumbent and challenger, including their campaign teams and supporters, used the social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as well as the interviews and seminars reported on mainstream online news media and uploaded on YouTube channels to attract 552 voters (*muktamarin*) and NU followers in general. Our research shows that 139 news appears in the three largest online news media in Indonesia: 1) tempo.co, 2) detik.com, and 3) kumparan.com in relation to the campaign messages of the contenders (Table 1). The *muktamirin* has the opportunity to learn whether to support Said Aqil or Gus Yahya since those messages have clearly distinguished both contender's policy and characters (see Benoit, 2013).

According to Benoit (2001; 2003), policies in most political campaigns are more discussed than the characters. Policies refer to issues such as politics, economics, religions, and educations while characters refer to the candidates' images such as personal qualities, leadership abilities, or ideals (Benoit & Airne, 2005). The data from our case study has shown that both incumbent and challenger discussed more on policies in all functions of the discourse: acclaims, attacks, and defences. However, it clearly evidenced that their campaign teams and supporters discussed more on characters. This finding may reflect the specific characteristic of political contestation within the NU, representing an Islamic organisation, when the candidates avoid making acclaims, attacks, and defences on the characters. Both Said Aqil and Gus Yahya came from the *pesantren* background. They studied Islamic theology to be an *ulama* who is considered as the reliable interpreters of the holy Koran and the Sunna (see Islam, 2022; Nakamura, 1981). Therefore, their campaign teams and supporters who come from political party backgrounds such as Nusron Wahid and Saifullah Yusuf took the roles in acclaiming, attacking, and defending on the characters.

Benoit & Airne (2005) argue that the incumbent usually acclaims more, particularly over past deeds, than the challenger. We found in our case study that Said Aqil acclaimed more over past deeds while Gus Yahya focused on future plans (Appendix 1). Said Aqil acclaimed the achievement of PBNU under his leadership in educations. Gus Yahya promised for political repositioning of the organisation that NU would be neutral in the 2024 presidential election. Gus Yahya's acclaims contradict with Said Aqil's vision that he would proactively bring NU engage in politics. Gus Yahya also emphasised his vision to revive the idea of Gus Dur in strengthening the NU's role in the global arena and to consolidate the NU as a social movement organisation. In terms of the characters, Said Aqil supporters acclaimed more on experiences while Gus Yahya's praised more on the need of regeneration (Appendix 1). Said Aqil's supporters acclaimed that NU still needs Said Aqil because he was an experienced leader. In contrast, Gus Yahya's campaign teams argued that NU is in an essential need for the regeneration. Gus Yahya is considered to represent the young and fresh generation who bring the ideal of Gus Dur. We also found that both candidates acclaimed to have great support from the charismatic *ulama* in which in the NU context they have strong influences in society and the *Muktamar* (Fealy & Bush, 2014).

We find that both incumbent and challenger tried to appraise their self-positive presentation in relation to policies and virtues to enhance their credentials, increase their benefits, and enhance their reputations (see e.g., Benoit & Airne, 2005; Benoit, 2001, 2003; Benoit & Harthcock, 1999). Said Aqil and his supporters came up with the positive achievement of PBNU during his leadership and with his positive reputation of leadership experience and Islamic educational background. Conversely, Gus Yahya and his campaign teams focused on the future plan of NU's political repositioning, the NU's role in the global arena, and the need of regeneration within the NU leadership. Those acclaims have clearly distinguished the incumbent from the challenger about the policies and characters (see Benoit, 2013). In that situation, the *muktamarin* have two options of policies and virtues whether to prefer NU's active or passive involvement in the politics and whether to support for the experienced leader or the young and fresh generation.

Both Said Aqil and Gus Yahya, along with their campaign teams and supporters, employed negative messages to demonstrate the weaknesses of their opponents and diminish their overall desirability (see also Benoit & Airne, 2005). Said Aqil primarily attacked Gus Yahya's involvement in the global American Jewish Committee (AJC) meeting and the rise of liberal thought among the young NU generations. Conversely, Gus Yahya focused on critiquing NU's active participation in the 2019 presidential election, the close relationship between NU and PKB, and the centralisation of the organization under Said Aqil's leadership. To downgrade Gus Yahya's image, Said Aqil insinuated that Gus Yahya received the government support, citing a hotel sabotage near the *Muktamar* venue orchestrated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Said Aqil's supporters criticised the provision of free flight tickets by Gus Yahya's campaign team to mobilise NU local delegates and expressed concerns about Gus Yahya's incomplete undergraduate education. In contrast, Gus Yahya's campaign team undermined Said Aqil's character by questioning his suitability to lead NU, suggesting that his re-election would impede leadership regeneration within the organisation. They also raised doubts about Said Aqil's reputation regarding the postponement of the *Muktamar*, potentially violating NU's constitution and indicating his managerial limitations.

Each candidate and their campaign teams and supporters also tried to answer and counter the negative messages (see also Wahyuningsih & Nirmala, 2020). Said Aqil defended his policy of NU's active involvement in politics, emphasising that it was for the development of the organisation and not driven by personal ambition. He responded to critics of his top-down leadership by stating that if the regional boards of NU were dissatisfied, they would not accept the accountability reports of his programmes during the *Muktamar*. In contrast, Gus Yahya addressed the concern about his relationship with the Jewish community. He argued that establishing close ties with Jews was crucial for peace negotiations between Palestine and Israel, as it aligned with Gus Dur's legacy in advocating for the freedom of Palestine. Regarding their characters, Said Aqil argued that his potential third term as the leader of NU would not violate the constitution. He also assured people that his age should not be the subject of concern, as he would involve younger generations in the organisation. Gus Yahya defended himself by stating that there was no government intervention to support him during the *Muktamar*. His supporters countered criticisms about his educational background. They argued that similar to Gus Dur, who did not complete his university studies, Gus Yahya possessed the necessary capacity to lead the organisation.

According to Benoit (2003), candidate who appears with more suitable campaign messages will be more likely to win the contestation. It is evident that Gus Yahya emerged as the dominant figure, both in terms of media coverage and the content of his campaign messages. The issues addressed by Gus Yahya and his campaign teams and supporters dominated in all functions of the discourse. Figure 2 shows that the idea and legitimation of Gus Dur and the repositioning of NU roles in political affairs dominated the discourse in acclaims. The issue of NU's political repositioning to maintain harmonies within society is strategical to attract the voters' preferability. This issue seems to become a common need of NU followers when in the case of 2019 presidential election people were ideologically divided between the supporters and oppositions of Joko Widodo (see Fossati, 2019; Pepinsky, 2019). This situation is similar to the *Muktamar* NU 1984 in Situbondo, when Kayane (2020) and Bush (2009) found that the majority of NU followers supported Gus Dur due to his proposal to accept Pancasila as the national ideology.

We found that the negative messages against Gus Yahya dominated the discourse particularly the issues of his visit to Israel and relationship with Jews community (Figure 3). However, Gus Yahya has been able to effectively respond to the attacks. Figure 4 shows the freedom of Palestine dominated the discourse in the defence clarifying that the Gus Yahya's active involvement in the Jews community was for the shake of

Palestinian freedom. It has reduced the apparent costs of Gus Yahya in *muktamirin*' eyes and prevent the erosion of his desirability (see Benoit & Airne, 2005). Moreover, Gus Yahya was able to utilise Gus Dur's figure, the respected and strong leader in NU after Hasyim Asy'ari (see Bush, 2009; Hasyim & Qodim, 2008), to legitimate his policies and characters. Gus Yahya acclaimed that his vision is to revive the idea of Gus Dur and he defended his relationship with the Jews community with Gus Dur's legacy. His supporters built an image that Gus Yahya represents the young Gus Dur, even his character in leaving the school was associated with Gus Dur.

Lee & Benoit (2005) and Benoit & Airne (2005) have found that the candidates who acclaimed more receive little support from the voters. We found the similar situation in Said Aqil who appraised more on his achievement in educations and organisational reforms. Nakamura's (1981) finding in the *Muktamar* NU 1979 showed that Achmad Saijchu lost the sympathy from the voters because he fought back against the criticisms of the local delegates through acclaiming the achievement of his efforts in PBNU. Said Aqil acclaim on his success in developing *pesantren An-Nahdliyah* under the legal entity of PBNU also contradicts with the NU institution that the *pesantren* has its root under the initiative of *ulama* (Barton, 2014; Saenong, 2021). Moreover, the negative messages in relation to the NU active involvement in the presidential election 2019 and the influence of PKB to the PBNU has reduced Said Aqil's favourability and increase the Gus Yahya's net favourability (see also Benoit, 2013). Said Aqil also did not defend how he will position NU with the PKB and in the next 2024-presidential election to prevent the erosion of his desirability.

12. KESIMPULAN PENELITIAN

Benoit (2019) found that campaign messages involving acclaim, attacks, and defences by candidates can influence voters' preferences. This phenomenon was observed during the *Muktamar* NU 2021. Said Aqil highlighted his achievements in education and healthcare development within the NU, while Gus Yahya promised to reposition the NU politically and emphasised the need for leadership regeneration. Both candidates targeted each other's weaknesses, with Said Aqil criticising Gus Yahya's involvement with the AJC and Gus Yahya questioning Said Aqil's leadership and the NU's relationship with PKB. Said Aqil's supporters concerned about Gus Yahya's incomplete undergraduate education while Gus Yahya's campaign team attacked Said Aqil's age. Both candidates defended themselves in which Said Aqil emphasised the NU's political involvement was not for his own ambition and Gus Yahya defended his connection to the Jewish community for the freedom of Palestine.

According to Benoit's research (2003), the effectiveness of campaign messages influences a candidate's chances of winning a contestation. In the *Muktamar* NU 2021, it is evident that Gus Yahya outperformed his opponent, Said Aqil, by presenting more appropriate and persuasive campaign messages. Gus Yahya's proposal to reposition the NU's political role garnered substantial support among NU followers. Moreover, Gus Yahya adeptly managed negative perceptions surrounding his visit to Israel. In contrast, Said Aqil's acclaims regarding his achievements in education, healthcare, and organisational reforms failed to resonate with voters. Furthermore, criticisms targeting the NU's active involvement in the 2019 presidential election and the perceived influence of PKB on PBNU eroded Said Aqil's favourability. As Nakamura (1981) figured out, the *Muktamar* NU provides a valuable case study of genuine democratic practices and dialogues within an Islamic organisation. The *Muktamar* NU 2021 exemplifies how the contenders, their campaign teams, and supporters engaged in addressing negative messages to demonstrate opponents' weaknesses. However, this contestation ended when the result of *Muktamar* was published.

13. STATUS LUARAN WAJIB

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14. DOKUMEN LUARAN WAJIB

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15. LINK LUARAN WAJIB

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16. STATUS LUARAN TAMBAHAN

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17. DOKUMEN LUARAN TAMBAHAN

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18. LINK LUARAN TAMBAHAN

-

19. PERAN MITRA (JIKA ADA)

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20. DAFTAR PUSTAKA

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21. LAMPIRAN-LAMPIRAN